

NEWS

Travellers' protest march on London



PROTEST IN PARLIAMENT SQUARE: Grattan Puxon, above, says direct action is needed

TRAVELLERS living in Essex joined a mass rally in London last Thursday calling on the Government to make greater provision for them.

Families who were evicted from their land in Little Waltham, near Chelmsford, in January, joined more than 100 other travellers in the march to Parliament Square.

The protesters called on the Government to re-impose a duty on local authorities to provide sites for gypsies and travellers.

The 1994 Criminal Justice and Public Order Act abolished this duty and travellers have since been encouraged to buy their own land.

Difficulties have arisen however, as in the case of Cranham Road in Little Waltham, when travellers have been unable to obtain planning permission to live on the land they have bought.

Cranham Road evictee Kathy Buckland said at the rally: "We do what we think is right and buy our own land - but we are moved on."

"We want the Government to know we are not going to take it anymore - we are human beings, after all."

Speaking after the rally, Grattan

Puxon, leading member of the Gypsy Council and secretary of the Roma Federation, said he was confident the Government would listen to travellers' demands.

He said: "We want the Government to realise that taking direct action, like Chelmsford Council did at Little Waltham, is a waste of taxpayers' money and causes a great deal of human suffering."

"The only solution is to designate suitable sites for travellers or to build new ones."

In Chelmsford, there are currently no available plots for travellers.

Chelmsford councillor Neil Gulliver, executive member for planning and transport, said however that four new licensed pitches should be available in the Runwell area by the end of the summer.

He added: "We are going through the local development document and looking to make land available for travellers within the borough in the same way we would allocate land for retail or housing use."

"We are hoping to identify more travellers' sites by autumn this year."